Characteristic of Effective Instruction

Teaching for Learner Differences

Purpose

The purpose of this brief is to describe teaching for learner differences as a characteristic of effective instruction as a part of the Iowa Core. The objective of teaching for learner differences is to implement a process of teaching, learning, and assessment that will effectively meet the learning needs of all students so that they can acquire the essential concepts and skills of the Iowa Core.

Definition

Teaching for learner differences is the process of providing instruction in a manner that maximizes each and every student's growth and success. It occurs through processes of teaching, learning, and assessment that ensure all students acquire the essential concepts and skills that will prepare them for success in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Teaching for learner differences involves the use of student assessment data to understand students' varying background knowledge, level of readiness, language, and learning and interest preferences and then responding through a process of purposeful instructional planning and effective instructional delivery. A critical component of teaching for learner differences is to determine the effectiveness of the instruction using a process of data-based decision making. Teaching for learner differences occurs within core, supplemental, and intensive levels of instruction.

Critical Attributes of Teaching for Learner Differences

Teaching for learner differences includes the following attributes:

- **Instruction is focused on the essential concepts and skills within the content (big ideas).**

  The teacher plans instruction with a focus on the most critical "big ideas" within the content area, which are aligned to the essential skills and concepts and skills of the Iowa Core. Instruction is focused on what is truly key to the understanding and practice of a discipline. Big ideas function as the keys that unlock content for the range of diverse learners. Those concepts, principles, or heuristics facilitate the most efficient and broadest acquisition of knowledge. Students understand the focus of the instruction because the teacher articulates the learning goals and success criteria in student-friendly language.

- **Instruction is designed and delivered to match students' needs based on assessment data of students' prior knowledge, readiness, individual interests, and learning preferences (instructional match).**

  Prior to instruction, the teacher assesses each student's prior knowledge and skills and identifies the zone of proximal development, including both learning gaps and learning strengths that may indicate the need for extension activities.

  The teacher uses assessment data to plan and deliver instruction that matches students' learning needs and integrates prior knowledge. Instruction is scaffolded to allow all students to engage in higher order thinking. Based on each student's level of interest, learning preferences, and motivation, multiple means of engagement are used to heighten the students' interest and effort.

- **Teacher provides flexibility within content, instruction, and product to allow for variances in students' acquisition and demonstration of learning.**

  The teacher meets each student's learning needs by providing a variety of learning formats and methods of instructional presentation including: flexible grouping, mediated scaffolding, multiple options for students to demonstrate what they have learned, multiple instructional approaches to enhance student engagement and motivation, review of key elements, questioning techniques, concrete representation to link abstract concepts, alternate formats of materials, and instructional conferencing.

- **Teachers provide clear instruction about how to learn, making the various strategies and skills of the learning process conspicuous to all students.**

  The teacher designs and delivers instruction of the learning skills and/or strategies that will result in students' application in learning situations. Teachers make these skills or strategies conspicuous for students so they understand that different learning tasks require different learning skills and/or strategies. The teacher clearly and purposefully teaches and models the skills or strategies, including the conditions under which they can be used and then assists students to use them independently. Students are encouraged to reflect upon the usefulness of strategies and are supported as they incorporate strategies into their repertoire or "toolkit" for future learning tasks.

- **Instruction includes opportunities for students to practice and review their learning and receive feedback.**

  Teachers provide sufficient time and appropriate instruction and matched to the student's level of achievement that enables students to master the essential concepts and skills of any subject. Success rate is a critical variable in student achievement. When students are provided with high rates of success during instructional activities, student learning is increased. High success rates correlate positively with student learning outcomes.

- **The teacher regularly monitors each student's progress related to the acquisition of the essential concepts and skills and adjusts instruction to meet students' learning needs.**

  Instruction is facilitated using ongoing and meaningful formative assessment data that allows decisions to be made about appropriate instructional changes. Changes allow for instructional efficiency and provide students with the learning experiences, practice, and feedback they need to master content.

Planning

Planning instruction is critically important when teaching for learner differences.

Teacher Actions:

- Determine the essential concepts and skills that will be the focus of the instructional content, aligned to the Iowa Core.
- Identify and clearly articulate the intended learning and success criteria, in student friendly language, that is aligned to essential concepts and skills.
- Use pre-assessment data to determine each student's zone of proximal development, aligned to the intended learning.
- Use diagnostic assessment data, when necessary, to determine the appropriate instructional match for student learning.
- Plan and design differentiated instructional tasks that will close learning gaps and provide extension opportunities so that all students acquire the intended learning.

Instructing

Instructional activities are facilitated that ensure that all students understand the concepts and skill sets of the Iowa Core.

Teacher Actions:

- Provide multiple, flexible methods of instructional presentation aligned to students' individual learning preferences.
- Provide a variety of instructional methods that will ensure students will acquire knowledge.
- Scaffold instruction to ensure that all students have access to higher order learning opportunities.
- Use multiple means of engagement, relevant to intended learning, to heighten student interest and effort.
- Provide explicit instruction to ensure students understand that different learning tasks require different learning strategies.
- Use appropriate materials and/or strategies to facilitate opportunities for students to practice intended learning with a high rate of success.

- Provide multiple opportunities and multiple modalities for students to demonstrate what they have learned.
- Throughout students' practice, elicit frequent responses, monitor student performance, and provide immediate, explicit feedback.

Student Actions:

- Understand and can describe the intended outcome of the instruction.
- Know that different learning tasks require different learning strategies and understand how to apply strategies to learning situations.
- Apply learning strategies to appropriate learning situations.
- Practice learned skills and adjust learning.
- Use the multiple modalities available to them to demonstrate what they have learned.

Monitoring and Assessment

Teacher Actions:

- Uses outcome/screening level assessments to acquire proficiency data of all students to determine the health of the system.
- Administer and use/analyze pre-assessment data to determine students' current levels of performance aligned to the intended learning.
- Administer and use formative assessments to monitor each student's performance and provide immediate, explicit feedback.
- When more information is needed, administer diagnostic assessments and analyze results to determine the appropriate instructional match for student learning.
- Administer summative assessments and analyze results to measure overall competency levels relative to learning targets.
- Implement a balanced assessment cycle to gather data to purposefully and continuously inform instructional practices.

Student Actions:

- Use assessment data and feedback from teacher and peers to reflect on learning and make appropriate adjustments.

Sources

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